



Mark 7

An OCF Bible Study

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Here we have another official delegation coming from Jerusalem to check out Jesus (v. 1-5). The concept of Jewish religious leaders evaluating Jesus' ministry was fine. In theory, these religious leaders were responsible for the spiritual well-being of the nation which included protecting Israel from a potential false prophet or false messiah. Their motives may be questionable, though, because they immediately found something to criticize Jesus for.

What did the Pharisees criticize him for (v. 5)? Eating without (ceremonially) washing their hands.

There is no biblical mandate for hand washing. Where did they get the standard they used to judge Jesus and his disciples? Their oral traditions. They did not evaluate Jesus against God's Word. They had so distorted the law that their traditions were considered by the scribes and Pharisees to be as binding as the Law of Moses itself, if not more so.

Note: According to tradition, for these ceremonial washings, special stone vessels of water were kept, because ordinary water might be unclean. To wash your hands in a special way, you started by taking at least enough of this water to fill one and one-half egg shells. Then, you poured the water over your hands, starting at the fingers and running down towards your wrist. Then you cleansed each palm by rubbing the fist of the other hand into it. Then you poured water over your hands again, this time from the wrist towards the fingers. A *really* strict Jew would do this not only before the meal, but also between each course.

Is there anything wrong with tradition? Nothing is wrong with tradition unless it trumps the truth of the Bible. When tradition becomes binding and/or when it becomes law and supersedes scripture, it is wrong. Our sole authority in the way we live our lives has to be the Bible. Not my church, my pastor, my denomination, etc.

What are some examples of traditions in our churches today? Communion style and frequency (Jesus did it Thursday night at dinner). Baptism type. Music style. No alcohol. No R-rated movies.

Application: Not everything in the Christian life is a matter of right and wrong, black and white. Some things are simply matters of personal conscience before God. The Scriptures do not command ritual washing before meals. If you want to do it, then fine. Do it unto the Lord (between you and God) and without a sense of spiritual superiority—don't look down on your brothers and sisters who don't share your convictions.

You cannot legislate obedience to God's Word. That can easily evolve into legalism.

What were the harsh words Jesus had to say about their tradition (v. 6-8)? *This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* They appear to be religious or spiritual but actually are far from God. They talk the talk but they don't walk the walk. They have a heart problem.

He accused them of being what (v. 6)? Hypocrites. The word for "hypocrite" in the ancient Greek language referred to "an actor" or "someone who wears a mask." The image they try to project is different than what they actually are.

He gives them a practical example of their hypocrisy (v. 11-12). What is the Corban issue all about? Jewish tradition permitted people to declare something they owned as Corban or "dedicated to God" and therefore inaccessible for everyday needs. Their perspective was, "I'm sorry Mom and Dad but I can't help you out financially because all my money is devoted to God—until or unless I need it for something."

What biblical principle does that violate? The 5th Commandment. The Old Testament clearly lays out the responsibility of children to honor their parents. The New Testament did not change that standard.

The Mosaic Law defined certain animals as unclean: pig, rabbit, shrimp, etc. (Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14). If the Jewish people ate unclean animals they became unclean and couldn't participate in Jewish celebrations including

the Sabbath and had to go through a ceremonial cleansing ritual administered by a priest which may have required as many as seven days to become clean again.

Jesus explained the aim of the Mosaic Law when it came to clean vs. unclean food (v. 14-23). What was the principle He was laying out? Uncleanness was not a result of eating unclean food. Uncleanness is a sin issue. It was a result of disobeying God's word not because of anything they ate. In essence Jesus said, "You're unclean because of the evil that comes out of your heart in the form of one of these ~~13~~ thirteen sins."

What is the significance of Jesus traveling fifty miles north to Tyre (v. 24)? It was Gentile country. Even though His focus was on the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24), Jesus increased His ministry to the Gentiles as He experienced increasing rejection from the Jews. If his own people would not listen, then Jesus would fulfill the mission foretold by ~~Is~~ in Isaiah (Is-49:6): *I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.* Jesus is fulfilling that prophecy by engaging the Gentile communities.

The woman who heard about Jesus and sought Him out was a Gentile (v. 25-30). A demon was afflicting her young daughter, and she begged Jesus to drive the demon out. Her persistent request for help demonstrated her faith in Jesus. She believed Jesus could heal her.¹

What did Jesus mean when He said, *Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs* (v. 27)? Jesus seems to discourage the woman, reminding her that the children (the Jewish people) have priority over the dogs (Gentiles like her) when it comes to His mission/ministry.

The term dogs here does not refer to wild dogs (scavenging animals roaming around the countryside) but to small dogs taken in as house pets. It is thus not a derogatory term per se, but is instead intended by Jesus to indicate the privileged position of the Jews (especially his disciples) as the initial recipients of Jesus' ministry.

How did the woman respond (v. 28)? She understood. The woman recognized that the Jews were a higher priority when it came to Jesus' ministry. In essence she said, "Just like the pet dogs get the table scraps, I'm willing to take the crumbs that fall off the table, the leftovers, anything you have to offer. She identified herself with the dogs (humility).

Why was Jesus pleased with the woman's response (v. 29)? The woman displayed strong faith, humility (her willingness to accept whatever Jesus would offer) and persistence. Her response pleased him to such an extent that he granted her request. She serves as a model for us on how to approach Jesus.

Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears (v. 33). Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. Why would Jesus use such an unusual way of healing? Jesus used many different ways of healing. He healed with a word, healed without a word, healed in response to one's faith, healed in response to the faith of another, healed those who asked, and He healed those He approached. He healed four blind men differently.

They begged him to "lay his hand" on him. Jesus didn't want to be tied down to any one "method." It's not about the method, but rather all about the sovereign power of God. You cannot put Jesus in a box. He is totally unpredictable.

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¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Mark*, 2014 Edition (published by Sonic Light, www.soniclight.com), pp. 102